

Vandals Cut Fence, Release 3 Tigers At Serenity Springs

Owners Posting Guard, Beefing Up Security

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VIDEO BY PN.WHARRISON

The owners of a big cat sanctuary in Calhan are beefing up security after vandals cut a fence and released three tigers.

Nick Sculac and Julie Walker said an employee found the tigers walking around the compound last week, then noticed that the north fence on their pen had been cut.

I cant believe that someone would even think of doing something like that, Walker said. They could have been killed. One of the workers could have been killed.

Sculac told 7NEWS that Serenity Springs Wildlife Center had gone 19 years without any major problems until last week.

Whoever it was climbed over the perimeter fence, Sculac said. They then cut hole in the chain link fence of the tigers enclosure.

Walker said the vandals were lucky. She said the three tigers in that particular pen were hand raised and in good spirits.

It wasnt that difficult for the staff member to put them back in their pen, she said. Had it been one of our meaner cats, it could have meant serious injury or even death.

Serenity Springs is home to 120 big cats. They have lions, tigers, cougars and panthers.

When asked who would want to release the tigers, Sculac replied, Maybe it just kids having fun and wanting to prove something. It might have been an animal rights group. One that wants to shut us down.

Sculac said there are many people who dont believe the big cats should be kept in enclosures.

There are people who bred these cats and raised them until they became too big to take care of, Sculac said. They cant be turned loose in the countryside or in the mountains, so this is the best place for them.

Sculac said that just a few days after the fence was cut an employee arriving for work noticed two people, a man and a woman inside the compound trying to pet a cougar through its cage.

He said the couple climbed back over the perimeter fence, ran to their vehicle and drove away.

The employee didnt get a license plate number.

When asked if he thought that the pair caught trying to pet the cougars were the same people who cut the fence, Sculac said, I dont know, but Ive thought about that.

He said hes grateful nobody was hurt.

Walker said the enclosures were built to keep the animals inside the compound. She said its a shame that they have to spend thousands of dollars now to keep people out.

Winter is our slow time, she said. We dont have many visitors and donations are down. Now, we have to find the money to pay for a guard and a security system.

Itll cost about \$7,000 - \$8,000 total, Sculac said. If anyone wants to help they can go to our website and find out how to contribute.

Walker said that without the sanctuary, the big cats would likely have to be put down.

This is our family, she said. These are our animals. We want to protect them for the rest of their life.

For more information about the wildlife center, tours, hours of operation and how to help, visit the website at:

<http://www.serenityspringswildlife.org/>

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